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Baker-Polito Administration Announces New Broadband Grant Program

Flexible grants will accelerate the construction of municipally-owned broadband networks in rural communities

BOSTON – Today the Baker-Polito Administration announced the Last Mile Infrastructure Grant Program, a new, flexible grant program designed to speed the deployment of broadband internet networks in more than 40 unserved Western and Central Massachusetts communities.

Under the new Last Mile Infrastructure Grant Program, the Baker-Polito Administration will make grants directly to rural communities currently unserved by high-speed internet access, for the design, engineering, and construction of publicly-owned broadband networks. The grant program will award up to \$20 million in capital funds directly to Last Mile towns, and will be administered by the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development.

"There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the broadband gaps currently facing rural Massachusetts towns, so our administration is empowering communities to pursue the solutions that are most appropriate for them," **said Governor Charlie Baker**. "We want broadband solutions to be flexible and responsive to local needs, regardless of whether our local partners pursue municipally-owned networks, public-private partnerships, or alternative technologies. The new Last Mile Infrastructure Grant Program advances our administration's commitment to tackling broadband connectivity challenges with collaboration, flexibility, and problem-solving."

"This new grant program will build on our reforms to the Last Mile broadband program, and speed the construction of locally-owned broadband networks," **said Lieutenant Governor**

Karyn Polito. “Western and Central Massachusetts communities have told us they want a more nimble and more responsive Last Mile program. We have taken their feedback to heart, and through this new grant program, we will accelerate the pace of progress on local Last Mile broadband challenges.”

“We are committed to helping every town that wants to pursue high-speed internet access, pursue a path forward to reliable, sustainable, affordable broadband,” **said Housing and Economic Development Secretary Jay Ash.** “We look forward to continuing our deep engagement with local and legislative stakeholders, as we work to deliver on our shared priorities.”

The Last Mile Infrastructure Grant Program will disburse both municipal construction allocations -- local construction budgets established by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) at MassTech -- and towns’ so-called professional services allocations. Local professional services funds were previously reserved for the design and engineering of local networks, and were previously held back and expended directly by MBI, on behalf of unserved communities. Under the new grant program, EOHED will combine these two allocations into a single award, giving Last Mile towns the flexibility to pursue engineering, and construction solutions for municipally-owned networks directly, as they would with other local infrastructure projects.

The program is modeled on EOHED’s successful MassWorks Infrastructure Program, a flexible, competitive grant program that funds local infrastructure projects that unlock economic growth. In addition, EOHED and the MBI will continue to assist municipalities that wish to partner with private broadband providers, or explore alternative technologies. MBI will continue to provide design and engineering services to communities that prefer to work with the organization.

The Last Mile Infrastructure Grant Program received approval today from the MBI’s board of directors. EOHED anticipates opening the grant program for applications next week, pending the approval of the Executive Committee of MassTech’s board of directors.

The Baker-Polito Administration is committed to significantly increasing broadband access under the Last Mile Broadband project. In May 2016, the Baker-Polito Administration introduced a [new Last Mile leadership team](#), and a [new framework](#) to accelerate implementation of broadband projects in unserved or underserved communities by empowering local partners through a more flexible, community-based approach. Since last May, the Baker-Polito Administration has supported efforts to expand broadband coverage to [nine partially served towns](#), advanced a wireless pilot program in [Middlefield](#), and approved grants to bring service to seven unserved towns: [Alford](#), [Otis](#), [Warwick](#), [Hinsdale](#), [Lanesborough](#), [West Stockbridge](#), and [Mount Washington](#). The Administration is currently assisting several towns in evaluating potential public-private partnership proposals, resulting from an [RFP issued late last year](#).

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